

I once lived next to a former PoW of the Japanese. George was a good neighbour literally and metaphorically, generous in his views and tolerant in most things. However, he loathed everything Japanese: their commodities, their place in the world, their tourists, etc. Conversations that drifted into the subject went only a very short distance further. I felt enormous sympathy for him as the brutality and degradation of his experiences clearly were causing the anguish of unresolved painful memories.

It is the 70th anniversary of VJ Day this month (victory over Japan). Japan as a nation has publicly apologised and made statements of regrets literally dozens of times since 1945, both to our nation and to many others with whom it has been in conflict. These have often been rejected in one way or another. I wonder therefore if perhaps the only meaningful act of contrition is the personal act of reconciliation - the change of heart and demonstration thereof by individuals. (A good example is told in the film, *The Railway Man*.)

In the Old Testament, God's people are for ever having to say sorry for their actions (or inactions) as a nation. In the New Testament things have moved on. It then gets very personal: individuals are healed by Jesus, individuals are forgiven by Jesus, an individual - Jesus - performs the ultimate act of reconciliation on the cross. Things have moved on now also; we understand differences in culture, differences in individuals, and the expectation that we will try as individuals to understand one another as individuals.

Following WW2, Emperor Hirohito, (according to a prime source) tried to take responsibility and apologise for the conduct of his people; General MacArthur rejected him. There was a lack of cultural understanding which missed an opportunity, but also, understandably, numbness of heart in the wake of great suffering and resultant bitterness. Too soon for forgiveness?

On this 70th anniversary of VJ Day, I have great sympathy for the victims of those days and places, but the greatest tribute to them now would be for us as individuals to overcome hatred and allow God's work to move on towards its completion. (After all, we as a nation have had our inglorious moments, too.) These new opportunities are for which George and his ilk suffered. An especially apt reminder in August, a month full of potential light and re-creation.